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“Beauty and the Beast” Unveiled: An Application of Critical Viewing to a Fable Turned Television Drama

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Abstract

*What kinds of things lead to the success of a television program? Is it the overall theme, or the smaller and perhaps contrasting elements that compose the program? This critique of *Beauty and the Beast* analyzes some of the possible reasons why this program survived as long as it did in the competitive television marketplace.*

He comes from a secret place, far below the city streets. Hiding his face from strangers safe from hate, and harm. He brought me there to save my life and now. Everywhere I go, he's with me in spirit. For we have a bond stronger than friendship or love. And although we cannot be together we will never, ever be apart (Catherine, *Beauty and the Beast*, 1987). Ron Koslow's 1987 television version.

And so another episode of “Beauty and the Beast” begins taking all of its viewers into another world that coexists with their own. A television version of *Beauty and the Beast* in the 1980s? At first, it appears silly because it is a fairy tale and even inconceivable because of other failed fantasy ventures, but the series caused a stir in the television industry as well as in television viewers. *Beauty and the Beast* achieved what all the critics in 1987 said it could not. The program made it past the pilot and even into a second season

In fact, *Beauty and the Beast* returned mid-season of 1990 with further episodes (Sujo, 1989, p. 32). The reason for the return of *Beauty and the Beast* was its cult-like audience which sent CBS thousands of letters pleading to keep *Beauty and the Beast* on the air. It appeared that for awhile *Beauty and the Beast* had beaten the odds and that is what made it a unique series.

The following study will analyze why the television interpretation of *Beauty and the Beast* endured. This question will be analyzed by critically viewing the series through the use of fantasy-theme analysis. In particular, this study will show how fantasy themes chained out to viewers using the work of television critics as examples of shared rhetorical visions. The visual medium of television lends itself quite well to this type of analysis. An analysis that increases the growth of visual literacy through practice. The methodology uses the terminology of "shared rhetorical visions" which can easily be interpreted to mean the visual literacy of shared fantasy themes. Basically, fantasy theme analysis is a form of visual literacy. Both can be and have been utilized to interpret visuals and their meanings.

Background for Studying Program

Beauty and the Beast attracted a large following of viewers who were extremely faithful to it, some might even say obsessed. A good example of this obsession was a fan letter sent to Vincent (the beast) published in a 1988 Rolling Stone magazine, "I watch your show every Friday night. For a while, I thought I was only a part of a tiny cult that had discovered your enchanted world . . . and I was delighted to discover that many other people share my obsession" (Rolling Stone, April 1988, p. 12). *Beauty and the Beast* was unique for more reasons than just the audience it attracted.

According to Scott (1988), "It has attracted a great deal of attention and, when it debuted on TV in September of 1987, was one of the most acclaimed, most talked-about new shows" (p. 68). The program became even more interesting because the series was not expected to do well. It was reported that:

Well before the premiere of *Beauty and the Beast* every one of New York's major advertising agencies, who must advise their clients early in the season where to put their money for the best ratings and most desirable demographics, branded the series the flop of the season (Clark, 1988, p. 14).

However, the agencies were proven wrong and a season later *Beauty and the Beast* was among the top forty programs with a weekly audience of 19.7 million (TV Guide, 1988, p. 14). Hence, the idea that this series stayed on the air is alone intriguing not to mention the endurance of the fable itself and the unconventional format of the program.

In order to understand how *Beauty and the Beast* came this far, one must look at the events that made a fable into a prime time television series. The idea emerged when Ron Koslow, the creator of the TV series, saw and was inspired by Jean Cocteau's 1946 film rendition of *Beauty and the Beast*. This

production had been the most famous media version of *Beauty and the Beast*, until the 1987 television program as well as the animated Walt Disney film version. Cocteau's film, *La Belle et la Bête*, had a dreamlike delicacy which allowed the viewer to experience the mythical world of the beast as opposed to the real world of beauty. This fantasy atmosphere attracted Koslow to the film rendition; in turn Jean Cocteau's film version was inspired by a French fable of the seventeenth century.

History of the "Beauty and the Beast" Fable

Mme. Leprince de Beaumont's account of *Beauty and the Beast*, published in 1757, is the most widely accepted rendition. It is this classic fable that is known today. However, the tale was originally written by Gabrielle-Suzanne Villeneuve in 1740 and was later shortened as well as polished by Mme. de Beaumont. These interpretations were based on stories that date back to some of the earliest tales told by man. An example of the latter would be the Greek tales of mythology. In these tales, the gods transformed into serpents, wolves and even pigs to seduce fair young ladies (Beaumont, 1968, p. 50). There are many media interpretations of this tale, yet the theme remains intact.

The theme of *Beauty and the Beast* has reappeared in films, plays, operas, and now television. It is Mme. de Beaumont's fable that has served as the basis for most of these media interpretations. The theme has been coined in many different clichés. For example, "beauty is only skin deep", "beauty is in the eye of the beholder", "don't judge a book by its cover," and many more phrases describe the main idea of *Beauty and the Beast*. In other words, importance is found inside a person not in the outside physical representation.

The narrative is simple. It is a tale of love, longing, and living. The original tale is about a beautiful girl (Beauty) who has to live with a beast to pay a debt owed to the beast by her father. The girl is fair, sweet, and loved by all who meet her. The beast is visually ugly and intimidating, but his personality is gentle and kind. Naturally the beast falls in love with the girl and wants to marry her. Beauty will not marry the beast because she thinks that she does not love him. Later, when the beast is dying from her denial, she discovers that she does love him. That is, she loves who he is, not what he is. In the fable, the beast turns into a handsome man because of her love. The girl is overjoyed but will miss the beast because of the difference between man and beast (Hogan, 1986, p. 90). The differences are that man is beautiful yet shallow while the beast is ugly yet deep. The television version of the tale follows the basic idea of *Beauty and the Beast* with a few alterations. The television series of *Beauty and the Beast* is not set in the seventeenth century but in the modern city of New York. The girl (Catherine) is still beautiful, but she has changed from a young innocent girl into a self-sufficient woman who is an assistant district attorney. The beast (Vincent) lives under the city in caverns and his physical appearance is attributed to deformity, not a spell cast by a witch. The debt that Catherine owes to this modern beast is her life. He

saved her after she was attacked by hoodlums. However, the beast owes Catherine as well because she has helped protect and maintain his home beneath the city (Koslow, 1987, September 25).

Review of the Literature of "Beauty and the Beast"

A majority of the studies that exist were conducted on the print and film renditions and, for the most part, these only include brief discussions of "Beauty and the Beast." Feminist studies mention "Beauty and the Beast," but most refer to the fable in terms of female sexual inadequacy. A mention of "Beauty and the Beast" in a film context is in Williams' (1983) study, "When the Woman Looks." The study analyzes horror films with the underlying theme of monster-girl relationships, briefly including "Beauty and the Beast" as one example of the sexual involvement of a female with a monster.

Additional research that discusses "Beauty and the Beast" are psychoanalytical studies. Heuscher's (1974) study is an example of a psychoanalytical approach. The study looks at origins, meaning and usefulness of fantasy themes, briefly using "Beauty and the Beast" as an example when discussing how monsters appear to be beautiful men when the young woman's light shines upon them (1974, p. 213). Another psychoanalytical approach to "Beauty and the Beast" is Carl Jung's *Man and His Symbols*. Jung recounts the tale of "Beauty and the Beast" and then analyzes it sexually, explaining that the young girl's sexual frustrations and her fears of incest are struggled with through her love for the beast (1973, p. 131). Bettelheim (1976) modernized Jung's sexual analysis by comparing and contrasting it to the tale of "Bluebeard." The former tale represents what true love is all about while the latter presents those primitive, selfish, and destructive aspects of sex which must be overcome if love is to bloom (Bettelheim, 1976, p. 306). These psychoanalytical studies are a few well-known examples which refer to "Beauty and the Beast."

A communications study completed by Jeff Adams (1986) used semiotics to describe the meaning of the fable. However, most of his book discusses the forming of a semiotic system for constructing meaning in any story. His analysis of "Beauty and the Beast" found that the reader identifies with Beauty. This finding is in direct opposition to Bettelheim's analysis of the fable. Adams accounts for the differences in his conclusion by explaining his interest in the meaning constructed by child readers while Bettelheim's perspective was that of an adult (1986, p. 106). A rhetorical criticism of the television version of "Beauty and the Beast" could be of value in offering insights as to why "Beauty and the Beast" endured past the first episode.

Review of Literature of Fantasy-Theme Analysis

The origins of fantasy-theme analysis began when Robert Bales (1970) observed a group fantasizing while working with groups in the classroom. Bormann expanded Bales' approach into a method of rhetorical criticism and fantasy-theme analysis became a controversial method in the field of communication. Bales described fantasy themes as occurring when:

The culture of the interacting group stimulates in each of its members a feeling that he has entered a new realm of reality—a world of heroes, villains, saints and enemies—a drama, a work of art. The culture of a group is a fantasy established from the past, which is acted upon in the present. One is “transported” to a world which seems somehow even more real than the everyday world. One may feel exalted, fascinated, perhaps horrified or threatened, or powerfully impelled to action, but in any case, involved. (1970, p. 152)

Bales believed fantasies aided a group in communicating messages and that the whole group became involved in developing as well as sharing the message through the use of shared visions. Bormann agreed with Bales’ interpretation of fantasy themes in small groups but delved further into the concept of the themes chaining out to others and becoming a shared vision. Bormann called the composite dramas of fantasy themes *rhetorical visions*.

A rhetorical vision is constructed from fantasy themes that chain out in face-to-face interacting groups, in speaker-audience transactions, in viewers of television broadcasts and in all the diverse settings for public and intimate communication in a society (Bormann, 1972, p. 398).

These rhetorical visions become shared symbols by groups, resulting in symbolic convergence. This is the central idea of fantasy-theme analysis, for without symbolic convergence there is a lack of fantasy themes in small groups or elsewhere. This key communication activity holds the entire analysis together and allows the critic a justification for studying fiction as a form of reality. Symbolic convergence occurs when members of a group are focused on the same representation through shared rhetorical visions. According to Bormann, symbolic convergence allows the critic to, illuminate how people who participated in the rhetorical vision related to one another, how they arranged themselves into social hierarchies, how they acted to achieve the goals embedded in their dreams, and how they were aroused by the dramatic action and the dramatic personae within the manifest content of their rhetoric. (1972, p. 401)

Once symbolic convergence is identified, it must be analyzed further to aid the critic in demonstrating that the fantasy themes are chaining out to other groups. The utilization of this analysis requires an intensive look at characterization, setting and the dramatic act.

In order to determine these factors, it is necessary to engage in a structured fantasy-theme analysis of both public discourse (television critics) and *Beauty and the Beast*. A structured fantasy-theme criticism implies analyzing the five elements: (1) finding evidence of shared fantasies; (2) coding for fantasy themes; (3) construction of rhetorical visions; (4) naming motives; and (5) the assessment of the rhetorical vision (Foss, 1989, p. 293-294). However before applying the criticism to the television series, one should examine the weaknesses of this method.

Although fantasy-theme analysis is not without its detractors (e.g. Mohrmann), it is generally received as a useful tool for the analysis of mediated messages. For example, Foss and Littlejohn (1986) used fantasy-theme criticism on the television film *The Day After*. The main critic of fantasy-theme analysis had been Gerald Mohrmann. He had a long list of problems with this method, but two serious predicaments stand out:

First, fantasy theme method is not a logically consistent extension of the theoretical bases from which writers contend it derives, and second, published critiques tend toward circularity in applying the dramatism that is the hallmark of the approach. (Mohrmann, 1982, p. 110)

Bormann (1982b) has defended fantasy-theme criticism by explaining that most critics do not hold fantasy theme within the proper perspective and that these critics are more interested in destroying the entire method than in working out some of its imperfections. The main weakness of the method is that it needs to develop more methodically. It is not a scientific theory and therefore should not be critiqued as one. Fantasy-theme criticism is a humanist theory that is constantly developing and creating new concepts.

Justification of Fantasy-Theme Analysis

The analysis of fantasy themes chaining out to TV critics can provide a better understanding of why the television series was such a sensation. After all, the main theme is a part of the fable that has chained out to groups of people for hundreds of years. Once the rhetorical visions are identified it will become more evident that the series may have had a good chance at being a successful program. Hence, the television version of "Beauty and the Beast" should not have been a surprise success, especially since the fable which the series is based on has been one of the most successful and widely known fairy tales ever written. However, a television program based on a well-known fable does not guarantee a successful series. An example of this would be "The Charmings" a television interpretation of Snow White and her Prince Charming. This program was a dismal failure. Perhaps, the success of "Beauty and the Beast" could be related to the current fantasy themes it chained out to modern society.

The fantasy-theme approach revolves around events that are not an immediate experience. Bormann suggested that fantasy themes may involve past or future events, but most often are used in events that no one has encountered yet:

Fantasy theme analysis studies the way communicators discuss fictitious and nonfictitious events in the past or in the future or at some other place than the here-and-now of the immediate communication episode. The ongoing flow of experience may seem chaotic or confusing, immediate behavior may seem impulsive, occurrences may seem accidental (Bormann, 1980, p. 190).

The fable *Beauty and the Beast* is a creative and imaginative visual interpretation of events now being perpetuated through the fantasy world of television. Fantasy-theme criticism presents itself as an appropriate way to critically view that which is written to be fantasy and is presented in a creative visual medium.

Beauty and the Beast is a natural choice for a fantasy-theme analysis in that it is a fantasy, but it is a fantasy based on very human emotions. These common emotions encourage the chaining-out of the fantasies of *Beauty and the Beast*. These fantasies have a greater chance of chaining out because of the program's television format which allows it to reach a large audience. This visual format is a conducive atmosphere for fantasy-theme analysis. This observation is consistent with David Berg's (1972) conclusion about the media in general:

Media do not simply confront us with "real" events of which we might otherwise remain unaware; they also, through the means of psuedo-events, extend our awareness of reality beyond the range of normal perception... By similarly expanding our awareness of virtually every issue facing mankind (p. 256).

Berg's explanation would suggest that the fantasy of *Beauty and the Beast* can help viewers understand current social problems. For example, an episode dealing with the homeless who take refuge in the caverns of Vincent's world would make viewers more aware of the problems facing the homeless. Actually, the symbolic convergence is more likely to occur if the rhetorical vision is based on society's current beliefs. "In the present time of anxiety, the medium should act on the assumption by excited people that it is the source of symbolic power in our culture, that it is the key to system-balancing of rhetorical visions in this country" (Brown, 1976, p. 599). According to Foss and Littlejohn, "In order to produce a successful television film—that is, one that generates the desired emotional response—a film producer must tap into prevailing fantasy themes of the culture" (1986, p. 318).

Using the current culture's fantasies would aid a program in reinforcing or adding to the visions that stimulate interpersonal discussion in small groups and prompt further fantasy-theme chaining (Foss and Littlejohn, 1986, p. 318). Ron Koslow (television producer) wanted his version of *Beauty and the Beast* to be popular and attract an audience so perhaps he tapped into the current culture's concerns hoping that if one group was attracted to the program their shared concerns would chain out to create a larger audience. When the larger audience shares these concerns with the original group and source, symbolic convergence may occur. In Bormann's terms, these concerns might serve as a basis for rhetorical visions. As members of the public come to share these rhetorical visions symbolic convergence is achieved (Bormann, 1982a, p. 133). The purpose of this analysis is to show that *Beauty*

and the *Beast* chained out through fantasies reinforcing or adding to the visions that stimulate interpersonal discussion in small groups and prompt further fantasy-theme chaining (Foss and Littlejohn, 1986, p. 318).

Fantasy-Theme Analysis of “Beauty and the Beast”

The time has now arrived to apply this radical, relatively new theory to the television version of *Beauty and the Beast*. The following discussion will apply fantasy-theme analysis to the program as a whole. The work of television critics will be used to support this analysis. The justification for the use of TV critics is that they are experts on the medium and they provide an indication of society’s responses to programs. If TV critics exhibit symbolic convergence with the main themes of *Beauty and the Beast* (the television version) and share these beliefs with their readers, then this is evidence of fantasy-themes chaining out to an audience. However, it could be that the television critics only describe the rhetorical visions already shared by an audience.

Thus, the work of critics will provide a source for the construction of the rhetorical visions of the television series *Beauty and the Beast*. Individual episodes will not be analyzed because the program’s overall themes are what make up the rhetorical vision. The rhetorical visions being sought are “a blend of discursive material, ‘here and now’ events, and fantasy themes which are woven together to form a drama that is credible and compelling” (Cragan, 1974, p. 5).

In undertaking the fantasy-theme analysis of *Beauty and the Beast*, it is important to follow the five steps of fantasy-theme analysis, beginning with finding evidence of shared fantasies. Is there evidence of shared fantasy themes in *Beauty and the Beast*? Well, if one can count an audience that watched *Beauty and the Beast* every Friday night at 7 p.m. Central Time (19.7 million a week the first year) or an audience that wrote thousands of letters to keep it on the air or even a group of TV critics who saw this program as a unique television drama that attracted a mostly female audience, then one could assume that *Beauty and the Beast* has fantasy themes that are shared. This program was not supposed to make it past the pilot, but, to the surprise of many, including TV critics, it became one of the hits of the season. In fact, most TV critics who thought the series would fail changed their opinions after seeing the pilot. Why the sudden change? The critics found the program unconventional and the literary writing in its scripts unique—a program that quotes Shakespeare and Keating. Even the Wall Street Journal mentioned that the series had held its own in the ratings (Bayles, 1987, p. 26). *Beauty and the Beast* not only impressed the critics but captured a large audience, in particular a large percentage of women viewers. There are many elements that could be analyzed that are shown here but certain evidence points to fantasy themes chaining out.

According to Variety, “Surely the most provocative pilot of the new season, CBS-TV’s *Beauty and the Beast* would seem to have strong potential

with female viewers in the top 18-49 demographic grouping" (*Beauty and the Beast*, 1987, p. 42). Newsweek agreed, "Stop giggling-this series ranks as a major hit, especially among women viewers" (Waters, 1987, p. 58). It appears that there are fantasy themes in use in this program attracted viewers, especially women viewers. Many critics believed the success was a result of its unique style which forced it to stand out among the standard programs of beauties and hunks. Perhaps it was the style or the characters, but *Beauty and the Beast* appeared to be chaining out fantasy themes to viewers. *Beauty and the Beast* left the Friday night prime time spot until mid-season of 1990 and was eventually cancelled. However, this did not stop its popularity and the series continues to share fantasy themes with its audience in syndication and other formats. The sharing was reflected in the medium of poetry albums. An article in the Chicago Sun Times reported that Ron Perlman (the Beast) had recorded an album of poetry upon the request of fans from the television series. The album sold over a quarter of a million copies and Capital records described the fans as "highly educated, involved, and interested women" (Sujo, 1989, p. 32).

It appears through analyzing the program that the series has not attracted an audience through gimmicks, car chases or visual displays of sex, but through creatively written and innovatively shot scenes that reach out to a specific audience. Examples of such scenes occur in the first episode when the series took the limited plot line of the fable and expanded it. The fable is a finite story, it has a definite ending. The series had to manipulate the limited ending to give it unlimited scope and possibilities. The producers of the television version set up the series by having the two main characters meet as a result of a near fatal mugging. The writers allow Catherine to experience Vincent's world as he experiences it, through a deformity, her own slashed and bandaged face.

There is evidence that fantasy themes are being shared in more than one group: TV critics, the fans and even poetry buffs. As one looks at these shared fantasy themes, it should become apparent why viewers were and are attracted to *Beauty and the Beast*. In order to understand the emerging rhetorical visions, it is important first to analyze fantasy themes which operate in the artifact. These fantasy themes fall into three distinct categories: setting, characters, and action or plotline.

The setting of *Beauty and the Beast* is very stylized and provides a unique look for the program. There are two main sets where the series takes place: the above world of Catherine and the below world of Vincent. The former is the city of New York and the latter is old abandoned tunnels beneath the city. The creator of *Beauty and the Beast* picked this city as setting for "a contemporary fable set in the magical primeval forest full of terrors and wonders that is New York" (Oney, 1987, p. 37). Koslow, the creator of the series, portrays this setting as a cold, stark, and unfeeling world with many problems. It is his representation of reality. This reality is contrasted with the underneath world of Vincent. The tunnels are shown to be a deep intertwining

maze where another civilization lives protected from the world above. Koslow portrays this world as populated by warm, friendly and united people that have escaped, not necessarily unscathed, from the harsh reality of the real world.

The city of New York is a mass of buildings and people. It is through the use of cinematic techniques like harsh lights and dark shadows that Koslow creates the images of stark reality. Similarly, he uses gauze on the lens when shooting the underworld of Vincent, giving it a soft and caring aura. Koslow uses white lights for a cold city above the ground and golden lights for a warm city below the ground. These are visions that are readily shared by others such as New York Times TV critic Steve Oney (1987), who observes, "Everything above ground is filmed in a stark, even brutally realistic style; everything below the surface is shot through a vaporous haze in hope of creating a mystical environment" (p. 37). The worlds are not just made up of places, but clothes and makeup play an important factor in the style of the sets. For instance, Catherine dresses in the latest fashions, while Vincent and his people wear Renaissance-style clothing which give the underworld a feeling of another time. Vincent's makeup creates the image of a lion-like beast dressed in capes from another time, giving the impression he is of another world.

Just as the setting creates a mood for the program, the characters add life to the themes. The two main characters are Catherine and Vincent. Catherine, the heroine of the series, is a beautiful self-sufficient woman, who is an assistant district attorney. She was a spoiled, rich corporate lawyer who became a new person when her life was saved by Vincent. After being touched by Vincent, Catherine started to notice that there were more precious things in life than the material world. She now dedicates her life to aiding the less fortunate and has entered into a special relationship with Vincent. For example, in one episode Catherine encounters a pregnant teenager, who is suicidal, and takes her to the underworld where Catherine and Vincent help her overcome her problems.

Vincent is the hero of the series. He is deformed and has lived his entire life in the below world of the tunnels because of his physical appearance. He appears to be half-man and half-beast. Vincent's life began by being abandoned by his parents and being taken in by a stranger. He has called this stranger Father and loves him as a parent. Father and Vincent have created a world of misfits beneath the city of New York who have become a society. This society at times has functioned as a family with Vincent being the protector of it. "Vincent is effective in making the 'Beast' into a sympathetic and compassionate hero" (*Beauty and the Beast*, 1987, p. 42). The first episode provides an example of Vincent's heroism when he saved Catherine's life by taking her to his world for medical treatment even though it jeopardized his civilization as well as his own life. Vincent is the character who is the soul of the program and is the major factor in attracting viewers. In fact, when "the New York Daily News conducted a write-in poll to pick the sexiest men on TV, Vincent finished ahead of Bruce Willis (Waters, 1987, p. 58). It may be

difficult to believe, but women all over the country were finding Vincent attractive because of his courtly manner and romantic behavior toward Catherine. Many would have traded places with Catherine, if given the chance, and were quite envious of their relationship which belongs in a fantasy of the past.

Villains are also important characters in the television series. The relationship of Vincent and Catherine is continually threatened by enemies and together they fight to overcome all that comes between them. One of the worst villains that Catherine and Vincent have faced was a real-estate developer who used thugs to evict the elderly tenants of a rent-controlled building (Bayles, 1987, p. 26). It is the setting that gives the program the mood and the characters that add the life, but without a plotline there is no story. *Beauty and the Beast* has three main plotlines: the development of Catherine and Vincent's relationship; the above world versus the below world; and the justice or injustice of social issues.

The development of Catherine and Vincent's relationship is based on mutual respect and understanding. Vincent cannot be a part of Catherine's world, but she can be a part of his world. Their love is one that is spiritual, intellectual and affectionate. The strongest physical representation of their love had been a kiss until the third season. It is a difficult relationship yet both work very hard to continue it. The hardest aspect of their relationship is that they must live apart from one another; yet they sustain the relationship for their mutual benefits. An example of their loyalty to one another is the episode in which Catherine's father dies. She turns to Vincent who takes her to his world to work through her grief, even though it hurts Vincent to know she will leave him eventually. The two are connected and sense the joy and pain of the other. The consummation of their relationship and Catherine's subsequent death marked a quick end to the series. It was the destruction of this plot line that resulted in only three episodes being aired in the third season.

The second plotline is the above world versus the below world. Throughout most of the series, the below world has struggled to maintain its anonymity from the cruel above world. There is a constant battle going on between these two worlds that coexist. The below world merely wants to continue to exist as a refuge for the misfits of the real world, while the above world constantly consciously and unconsciously threatens the survival of the world below. This threat can be seen in an episode in which an extremely tall building was being built in the above world and the foundation for this building was so deep the blasts were shaking apart the world below.

This same example also illustrates the third main plotline of *Beauty and the Beast* which is the justice or injustice of social issues. Many times during the series Catherine and Vincent have had to unite against evil forces that threaten the weak of both worlds. The earlier example not only threatened the below-world people but the elderly people who used to live on the site. This time the ending was just and they were able to stop the construction, but not all the episodes end happily. Several of the episodes make a statement about

current social issues. As Gerard (1988) of the New York Times said, "Critics were also struck by the fact that the program dealt sympathetically with important social issues" (p. C20).

It is unique that a series based on a fairy tale actually manages to touch on some unsettling contemporary realities. It is out of these themes that rhetorical visions are formed. The rhetorical vision of *Beauty and the Beast* is best described by Gerard of the New York Times, "A modern fable about idealized love across the barriers of two worlds that coexist but never merge" (1988, p. C20). It is the uniting of the main themes that creates the rhetorical vision of this artifact. A beautiful woman has fallen in love with a kind and gentle beast who lives in an alternative, more civilized society below the brutal streets of New York. She wants to escape to his world, but she cannot truly be a part of his world and he cannot become part of hers, so they are destined to live their lives separately. However, this does not mean that they cannot have a relationship. It is this rhetorical vision that the viewers share with Catherine and Vincent. Ron Koslow similarly states:

The viewers do seem to be quite drawn to Vincent and Catherine...It certainly does harken back to the era of courtly love, the idealized love of a knight for his lady. Catherine and Vincent must make love in their minds, with an exchange of ideas and feelings (Gerard, 1988, p. C20).

Their two worlds cannot merge, but they do occasionally visit one another. A parallel path exists for Catherine and Vincent. Together the two help the weak and battle the injustices of both worlds, while caring for each other at the same time. The critics agree that viewers identify with Catherine and want to escape the pressures of the real world for the protection as well as the love provided in the fantasy world below New York.

In a way, the viewers are escaping with Catherine via the television set; the fantasy box that allows people everyday to escape the real world. Viewers can visit this world but can never become a part of it, no matter how much they would like to escape into a fantasy world. It is true that "Beauty and the Beast" is an excellent vehicle for escapism. Predictably, the series attracts a highly educated audience. *Beauty and the Beast* has what "America hungers for and that's childlike romance" (Gerard, 1988, p. C20). The essence of the vision is the idealized love of two individuals from different worlds.

Having constructed the vision, the next step is an analysis of the motives of the viewers that share the vision. The primary motive for the group sharing this rhetorical vision has already been mentioned, escapism. However, this escapism aids people in looking at their world in a different light. Perhaps, Ron Koslow wanted to provide entertainment but with a message. The original fable tried to teach the lesson that beauty is only skin deep and the series continues the tradition. What better way to communicate a lesson than through the use of fantasy themes that chain out to critics and/or viewers by creating symbolic convergence?

As a whole then, it appeared that when critics thought of the television version of *Beauty and the Beast*, they saw their own world and a mystical world of escape through ideal love. The idea of escaping into Vincent's world is and was attractive to many people. That is just what viewers did every Friday night for two years. Koslow was inspired by Jean Cocteau's film rendition of *Beauty and the Beast* because of the dreamlike feel to the film, but he took his version one step further by using it as a vehicle to make statements about current social problems. His main statement had been about the homeless and the weak of today's world. The example mentioned earlier about the elderly being kicked out into the streets of New York to fend for themselves is making a statement to viewers. The message is this could be you, but there is still hope if people get involved like Catherine and Vincent. The rhetorical vision in *Beauty and the Beast* is effective, intriguing and needed.

This is a vision that is shared by many who believe that united individuals can make a difference. People are not helpless as long as they care about doing something about an injustice. Dr. Jack Zipes assesses the program as follows:

They found equivalents in contemporary society - the beast as outcast who lives with the homeless. I think it's a fascinating way to interpret a traditional fairy tale and make it very relevant with regard to social and political problems, the homeless, outcasts. It has a nice sense of justice. (Gerard, 1988, p. C20)

It is a comprehensive look at our own world through the simple narrative of a fable come to life. It is a television program that deals with love versus hate, justice versus injustice, and the corrupt world versus the untouched world. It is escapism and yet it provokes thought at the same time. In a world frightened of love because of AIDS, it reassures that there can be love without sex. In fact, this love is a stronger bond between individuals who mutually care for each other. The idea is quite foreign to today's society. As Vincent tells Catherine, "I know what I am. Your world is filled with frightened people and I remind them of what they're most afraid of; their aloneness" (Vincent, 1987, September 25). To a society that is looking for companionship at any price, Vincent's message is a compelling one.

People are scared of the unknown and drawn to it at the same time. Society admires uniqueness but is itself a haven for conformity. "Beauty and the Beast" is a reminder of all that is good and bad in the real world as well as a beacon of hope for what life could be. Mr. Witt, one of the executive producer of the series, assessed "Beauty and the Beast" in this way:

As a society, we're becoming more and more familiar with our own corruption. To many, New York is the zenith of that corruption. In fantasizing an underground society beneath the city, we're presenting a spiritual alternative in the guise of entertainment (Oney, 1987, p. 37).

Beauty and the Beast provided an alternative world to escape into as well as an alternative television program to watch. It brought back the era of

romance, if for only an hour every Friday night, perhaps a primary reason so many women were attracted to this program. The overall assessment of *Beauty and the Beast's* rhetorical vision is positive because it has not only entertained and targeted visions that exist in society, but it has created a vision which deals with true love, justice and pertinent social issues. The viewers are educated about the injustices of the outcasts and the downtrodden of the world and told there is always hope as long as we work together. A program like *Beauty and the Beast* provides the insight needed to open the eyes of society to what their world has become and to what it could be. "Beauty and the Beast" was considered a positive force amidst a mass of negative and trite television programming.

Conclusion

Beauty and the Beast was a unique program that usually would not be expected to succeed on the air. A possible explanation for its success is that the rhetorical vision of *Beauty and the Beast* chained out to viewers. Evidence of this possibility is contained in the words of the television critics, who mention repeatedly the program's themes of love versus hate, justice versus injustice, and the corrupt world versus the untouched world.

This study analyzes the original story format of *Beauty and the Beast*. The program did not continue, but for at least a brief time it made Shakespeare and Keating a "prime time" success. While the program and Vincent are interconnected, Catherine's relationship with Vincent is the basis for the fable and without Catherine the main theme cannot remain intact. The Rockford Register Star reported that when *Beauty and the Beast* returned midseason it would return with a lot less of beauty (Buck, 1989, p. 3). Catherine did not play a major role in the changed format. This resulted in the changing of the series' main theme and most likely altered the fantasies chaining out to viewers. The future of Vincent and the television series, *Beauty and the Beast* was both dependent on these shared rhetorical visions, as Vincent has echoed Shakespeare before, "I am only what I am. If you cut me, I will bleed. If you strike me, I shall strike back. And if you keep me chained, I'll die" (O'Conner, 1987, p. H35). And indeed, the series did die in the third season.

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